REFORMATION TODAY '85

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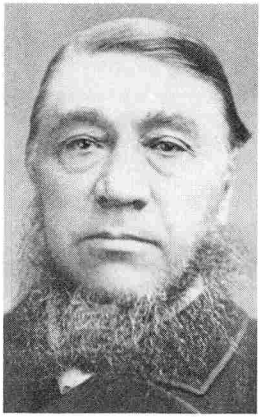
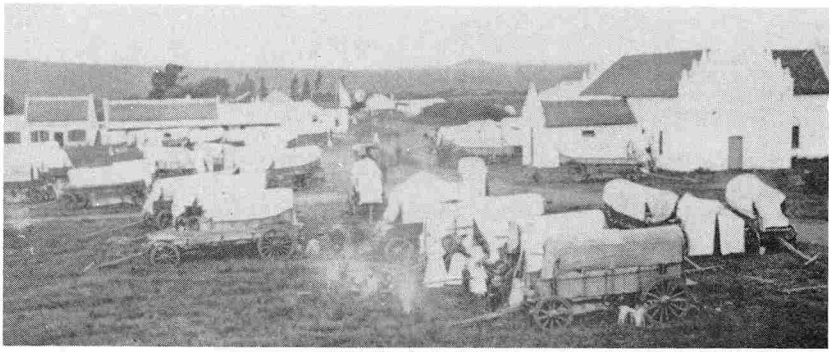


President Paul Kruger

Pretoria today

The University Church, Pretoria



Pretoria at its inception in the 1870s

Editorial – South Africa

For family reasons I recently spent a month in South Africa. My father died on October 4th aged 81. Up to the time of his decease he was active as an architect and was well known in the Margate area of Natal. Pastor Anton Hoffman of the Hillcrest Baptist Church preached at the funeral service on the all sufficiency of Christ and the absolute necessity of faith in him for salvation.

Even though I grew up in South Africa and have always kept in close touch with that country I still find it very difficult to appraise the situation there spiritually and politically. I think that most materials presented in the mass media are misleading and inaccurate. While in South Africa there were riots in Birmingham, Liverpool and Brixton. The way in which the South African press presented the news was equally misleading. There is a tendency for people to make blanket judgments and we must resist that.

Civil disorder gains enormous publicity mainly because of television. This publicity is often grossly out of proportion to what it deserves. This is true not only of South Africa but of the world as a whole. This method is immoral. It is being used by terrorists. I may be the victim in my society of injustice but this does not give me the right to rampage through the streets and burn down the property of others. I do not have the right to break shop windows and loot. Is it right if I do these things to vindicate my wickedness by saying that it is providing good publicity for my cause or my political party? Once we give way to reasoning of this kind we will end with the barbarity of bombings and murders that are common in the conflicts of Northern Ireland and Israel.

As Christians we are bound to employ spiritual and not carnal means to persuade the authorities. As believers we are bound by the example of our Lord to refrain from violence which is futile because it fails to reach the heart. As Christians we have powerful weapons of truth which can be directed to the consciences of men and women to convict them of the evil of hatred and the iniquity of racialism. We have powerful means to persuade others that love is the only way and that it is God's way. Black Christians in South Africa are suffering for holding to these principles. They are derided by fanatical elements who say that the way of love has not succeeded.

We must not be discouraged. As Emelda says in the interview nothing is achieved unless basic heart attitudes change. I have seen much change among whites in South Africa especially among the younger generation. Few of the old people change. Many in middle life do, and there is hope that the up and coming generation will be entirely different. Responsibility for the future lies with them. I was personally much encouraged when a black pastor stood up in a large fraternal of ministers in London and testified in detail as to the great change of attitude towards black people in London over the last 20 years. We are not in heaven yet by any means, but it would be foolish to deny that great strides have been made.

There is at present widespread demand for economic sanctions against South Africa.

Front cover. **Pastor Martin Holdt with the University Church in the background. The rest of the elevation can be seen opposite.**
Page opposite. **The three leaders from the past are shown as a reminder of South African history. The Boer War (1899-1902) is a most important factor to be remembered. The three leaders shown are Thomas Burgers, President of the South African Republic, 1872-7, Cetewayo, King of the Zulus, and Paul Kruger elected four times as South African president. It is interesting to observe the prominence of the Dutch Reformed Church in the photo of Pretoria when it was beginning. Large well attended Dutch Reformed churches are to be found throughout the Republic today. Reference to the powerful influence of that denomination is made in the editorial article.**

It has been reported that a poll was taken from some 400 urban blacks in the Republic and that 73 percent of them were in favour of sanctions. This is understandable from people who are deprived of political expression and who detest the injustice of apartheid. It is not often that the deep implications of sanctions are thought through. It is all very well talking about preference to starve and suffer martyrdom but if that comes from a spirit of bitterness it will only lead from one tyranny to another. The Boers hated the British and their instincts for self preservation were largely responsible for the invention of apartheid as separate racial development, something which has become notorious and despised throughout the world. The greatest danger of the future now is 'a white hate' which replaces 'apartheid'. What is gained if one tyranny replaces another? Economic prosperity is a powerful ally for the black people of South Africa whether they are willing to acknowledge it or not. Economic power enables and furbishes all kinds of positive initiatives, but what power belongs to the pitiful and destitute peoples of countries which we often see on our TV screens? Buthelezi, chief of the Zulu people who number five million, is opposed to sanctions. It is not hard to see that if he speaks for a powerful group of people united behind him he has formidable authority, but if he has to speak for five million starving beggars it will be bread he is thinking about rather than the sharing of power.

It is not possible to understand the situation in South Africa unless the history of the country is borne in mind. There is a vigorous right wing racist party which opposes change. The first pioneer of apartheid was a former Dutch Reformed minister, D. F. Malan. He said that 'Afrikanerdom is not the work of men, but the creation of God'. The best face of apartheid was that it would serve the best interests of all the races with their respective languages. The worst part, which is often compared with Nazism, is the notion that the Afrikaners would themselves be the superior race to control the destiny of the others. We read in 1 Kings 9:13 of King Hiram who called the towns that Solomon had given him 'the land of Cabul' which in Hebrew sounds like 'good for nothing'. The parallel is obvious. Apartheid has led to many forms of racial discrimination and injustice. What is the key to the dismantling of the system?

My view is that the key lies with the Dutch Reformed Church. If that highly influential body makes a concerted effort then apartheid would be ended soon.

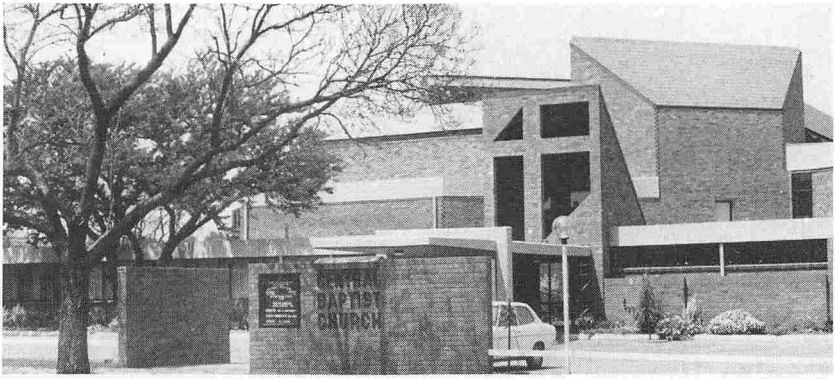
Almost all Afrikaners, who form 60 percent of the white population, belong to the Dutch Reformed Church which is divided into three denominations; Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk, Die Gereformeerde Kerk, Die Herformde Kerk. Of these the first, which we call 'The NG Church' for short, is the largest, having about 80 percent of the Afrikaner loyalty, while the other two share about 10 percent each.

What is the present view of the Dutch Reformed Church concerning apartheid? As we would expect of such a large body opinion is divided. A great proportion of the membership is nominal and not spiritual. Yet in spite of that there are significant moves to remove apartheid. For instance during September this year the press reported that 'NG theology students and lecturers at Stellenbosch University have taken a strong stand against apartheid and the "suffering it causes".

Pledging themselves "as future ministers of religion" to get rid of anything which causes suffering or discriminates against fellow South Africans, the group of about 100 students and 15 lecturers from the school of theology backed away from any attempt to justify apartheid scripturally.

"We confess that in the past we have not taken the cry of need of fellow South Africans seriously enough. We are aware of the fact that we have often hurt many people by taking a neutral stand," said their statement in the latest *Kerkbode,* official mouthpiece of the NG Kerk.

The students and lecturers said they were disturbed by the situation in the country and tense relationships between Christians and churches.



Recently completed is the Central Baptist Church, Pretoria. President Paul Kruger laid the foundation stone of the first church in 1891. The Baptists built a substantial church in 1948, the foundation stone for that being laid by Murray Hofmeyr.

"We have been deeply affected by the suffering and need of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as other people.

Even if we cannot always fully understand the sorrow, tension, frustration and anxiety of all who suffer, we nevertheless wish to say that the suffering of everyone in need has been felt in our own hearts."'
(*Pretoria News,* 20.9.85).

Prof. Johan Heyns of Pretoria, probably the best known biblical author of expository and biblical books in Afrikaans, spoke for many when in a public meeting in Pretoria this year he declared: 'Christians in S.A. will have to repent of the sin of race prejudice and ask for forgiveness for their past support for apartheid both on a vertical and horizontal level!'

Some may argue that these are just words. What about action? There is action too. One of the theological professors from Stellenbosch University has resigned his post and obtained permission to live in the Black area of Mamelodi near Pretoria so that he can devote his life to ministry among the black people. Another DRC minister (Gereformeerde – who are more distinctly reformed theologically than the NG) works as a minister to black people in Sharpeville. He is an enthusiastic supporter of the annual Evangelical and Reformed conference which has always been multiracial and interdenominational. These are not isolated instances. It would be difficult to calculate the fine solid work done by evangelicals in South Africa. There is also a reservoir of goodwill built up which is never mentioned by the secular press.

By way of conclusion I refer to Paul's injunction to pray for kings and all in authority. Do we do this, or do we only pray for the party we agree with? Do we pray for national and local government at all?

> *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:1,2).*

If South Africa's problem could be solved and the races there brought into harmony, the possibilities are boundless. The Christian community has an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate that unity which transcends colour and race. The unity we possess in Christ not only strengthens us here but points to the world of love beyond. The more we can have of the spiritual now, the more are our prospects of peace and unity in this troubled world below.

An interview with Emelda Damane of Atteridgeville

Please tell us about your background

My father descends from a royal line in the Sotho people. He left Lesotho to work in Natal where he married my mother who is of the Zulu people. I married a man of the Pedi tribe. This was a disaster for me since our cultures clashed. I was not a Christian and could not cope with the problems which led to divorce.

What about your conversion?

My grandmother was a believer. She always prayed as if she was talking to someone she knew really well. However I did not understand the gospel when young and it was only in recent years when witnessed to by the Baptists of this town that I came under a deep conviction of need and repentance. Up to that time I hated white people and I hated God as the God of white people. This was in spite of the fact that when I left school I was virtually adopted by a white couple who did not have any children of their own. I was like a member of their family and they were persecuted by other whites and called 'kaffir boeties' (a belittling expression for those who fraternize with blacks) because of the way they looked after me. That did not deter them at all and it was only later when I was exposed to the city that I came to feel and resent the superior attitudes of the whites.

What has been your personal experience with regard to your house being burned?

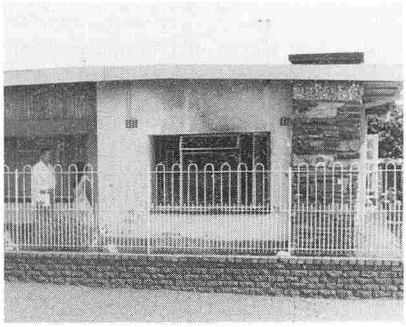
I had a premonition that it would happen and prayed that the Lord would prevent it. He did answer my prayers in part, because I desperately wanted the preservation of my books and manuscripts. The fire was confined to one room and my papers were preserved. But they have tried to burn my home again using petrol bombs.

Cases of brutality and mismanagement are well publicized but what is your view of the police?

Of course conditions vary but I must say we need the protection of the police. We can easily be the victims of criminal elements which exploit situations of anarchy. The police here have genuinely tried to be helpful and track down those who are guilty of crime.

What is your view of the future?

The problem of fear and suspicion is acute. It is not just a matter of removing bad legislation which deprives us of freedom to move freely. It is not just a matter of removing the notices which confine public provisions to whites only. The real and deep problem is one of the heart.



Emelda's home showing the front room which was burned

What is the use of new and better legislation if we are still to be regarded as savages? What is imperative is that mutual trust and respect be established. It is not enough for the government to build us better and bigger houses and provide more amenities which we need. What we desire most of all is to be accepted as people. What has been lost is a mutual trust of each other. That is a tragic loss. The damage must be repaired. Confidence must be built up. Surely this is a great opportunity for Christians to lead the way.

Should Christians be involved in politics?

Issues facing Christians today
A major appraisal of contemporary social and moral questions. John Stott. 340 pages. Marshalls. £5.95.

The author of this significant book acknowledges the generous help given him by a team of workers. The work is divided into four sections: 1. Christians and their relationship to a non-Christian society, 2. Global issues such as the nuclear threat, ecology and conservation and human rights, 3. Social issues such as work and unemployment, industrial relations, racial issues and poverty, 4. Sexual issues; feminism, marriage and divorce, abortion, homosexuality. The study concludes with a call for Christian leadership.

A mine of up-to-date well-researched information is provided and the whole presented in a most readable way. In this review I will concentrate on one issue only which is raised by the call for Christian Leadership and which is implicit throughout this book, that is, the Christian and his involvement in politics.

Most of us have inherited the simplistic idea that a sharp distinction can be made between religion and politics. Pastors keep to the gospel and MPs keep to politics. This notion is often confirmed in our minds when we observe modernistic bishops and liberal clergymen of the W.C.C. ilk denying the very basics of the gospel and blundering along as third class amateur politicians. We tend to congratulate ourselves on being so wise as to refrain from politics and maintain faithfulness to our mandate to preach the whole counsel of God's Word.

Immediately let it be asserted that John Stott is not encouraging Christians to dabble in party politics. Nor is he denying in any way the absolute priority of the gospel. He does however challenge the simplistic concept that we can divorce ourselves from pressing social issues. This becomes transparently clear when he cites a report on this subject in the following way (p. 11).

Social Service	*Social Action*
Relieving human need	Removing the causes of human need
Philanthropic activity	Political and economic activity
Seeking to minister to individuals and families	Seeking to transform the structures of society
Works of mercy	The quest for justice

Genuine Christian social concern will inevitably embrace both social service and social action. It is artificial to divorce them.

If travellers on the Jerusalem-Jericho road were regularly beaten up, and habitually cared for by Good Samaritans, the need for better laws to eliminate armed robbery becomes paramount. If road accidents occur regularly at a junction, it is not more ambulances that are needed, but decisive action in installing traffic lights. It is good to feed the starving, but much better to eradicate the causes of such dire suffering. Great wisdom and caution is required when it comes to Christian involvement in social and political issues. Our Lord himself is the supreme example of this. His silences were of great political significance. He did not endorse Jewish Nationalism. He did not condemn slavery. He did not denounce Roman occupation. He did not attack Caesar. He did denounce the Pharisees and Sadducees who virtually represented a political leadership. Humanly speaking his clash with them led to his demise.

Sometimes when we think of politics and the State our minds turn to Romans 13:1-4, which some of us may think of in a way which gives unqualified power to the State. Perhaps we should look at that passage again and seek to interpret it within the context of the N.T. as a whole.

From pages 2 to 26 John Stott provides a compact and thoroughly informative historical survey with regard to evangelicals and social action. Special reference is made to the involvement of 'the Clapham Sect' who were mocked as 'the Saints', but who accomplished great social reforms. Five reasons are then given as to why evangelicals become alienated from social concern and this is followed by an exposition of five central biblical truths which demand that we show interest in social concern.

Why have a Church Covenant?

Malcolm H. Watts

The Bible's great theme is God's covenant. One of the very first things we notice about the Bible is its division into two parts: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word translated 'testament' generally means 'covenant' and it would have been better if that word had been chosen because the Bible is essentially the revelation of the covenant.

What is this covenant? It is the gracious 'arrangement' made within the Godhead from all eternity concerning the salvation of sinners (Gal 3:17; Eph 3:11; Heb 13:20). God has promised upon the basis of his Son's redeeming work, friendship and everlasting life (2 Tim 1:9; Tit 1:2). The gospel makes this known and reveals that by faith, sinners can be united to Christ and involved in the covenant which to them becomes simply a promise of absolute grace. 'Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David' (that is the mercies promised to David). (Is 55:3; cf. 2 Cor 1:20; Eph 3:6.)

A sinner must be personally incorporated into this covenant to be saved. 'He hath made with me,' says David, 'an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire' (2 Sam 23:5). When, however, a group of professing believers unitedly enters that covenant, it becomes a church, with all the privileges of worship and ordinances. As God once said to the people of Israel, 'If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation' (Ex 19:5,6). 'Under this covenant,' writes John Ball, 'the natural seed of Abraham bore the face of the Church.'

Biblically understood, the church is a company of people called into covenant and communion with God. Our spiritual forefathers saw that clearly. John Robinson, pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, wrote: 'This we hold and affirm that a company consisting though but of two or three separated from the world . . . and gathered into the name of Christ by a covenant made to walk in all the ways of God made known unto them, is a church, and so hath the whole power of Christ.'

This was the concept of the church generally held among the early Puritan Separatists.

As early as 1582, Robert Browne wrote that, 'the church planted or gathered is a company or number of Christians or believers, which, by a willing covenant made with their God, are under the government of God and Christ, and keep his laws in one holy communion'. His church at Norwich was formally constituted by covenant. We have Browne's own account of it: 'A covenant was made and their mutual consent was given to hold together. There were certain chief points proved unto them by the scriptures, all which being particularly rehearsed unto them with exhortation, they agreed upon them and pronounced their agreement to each thing particularly, saying: to this we gave our consent. First, therefore, they gave their consent to join themselves to the Lord in one covenant and fellowship together and to keep and seek agreement under his laws and

government; and therefore did utterly flee and avoid such like disorders and wickedness as was mentioned before.'

The only other sixteenth-century Separatist church about which we have information is the one founded by Henry Barrow and John Greenwood in Islington, London, in 1588. One member described how, on joining the church, 'he made this protestation that he would walk with the rest; and that so long as they did walk in the way of the Lord, and so far as might be warranted by the word of God'. Francis Johnson, who became the pastor in 1592, speaks of this church as 'a company of faithful people ... gathered or joined together in all holy covenant and fellowship of the gospel of Christ by voluntary public profession of faith and purpose to live and walk together in the obedience of Christ, according to his word, to the praise and glory of his name'.

A few years later another London church was gathered, Henry Jacob, the man who founded it, had acknowledged in 1604 that a church is formed 'by free and mutual consent of believers joining and covenanting to live as members of a holy society together'. In 1616 ten men (including Henry Jacob) came together at Southwark to establish a gospel church. Here is the eye-witness account: 'Those who minded this present union . . . joined both hands, each with each brother, and stood in a ringwise. Their intent being declared, H. Jacob and each of the rest made some confession or profession of their faith and repentance – some were longer, some were briefer – then they covenanted together to walk in all God's ways as he had revealed or should make known to them.'

The records show that there were churches formed by covenant at Bristol, Woodbridge, Bray, Mattishall, Canterbury, Axminster, Bury St. Edmunds, Wattisfield, Bassingbourne, Woodall, Cockermouth, Bideford, Wrentham, and in many other places. The church covenant idea is no novelty but something deeply embedded in the earliest history of independent evangelical churches. It was considered 'the sole formal cause' of 'a true gospel church'. Henry Ainsworth wrote in 1608: 'Every people called of God into covenant and communion with Christ, and one with an other, and so walking, though with much weakness, ignorance, and daily sin, is to be esteemed a true church of God: but they that are not so called and come into covenant with the Lord, howsoever they may profess many excellent truths, yet want they the main essential thing which makes a true church.'

We examine now the scriptural basis for a church covenant.

1. In patriarchal times it was the covenant which made Abraham and his family the visible, external church. God said to Abraham: 'I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee' (Gen 17:7 cf. 12:1-3; 15:1-17). By way of this covenant others appear to have joined the church. Mamre, Eschol and Aner are said to have been 'confederate' (or, bound in covenant) 'with Abraham' (Gen 14:13). Some commentators see that as merely 'an economical and political pact'. This is not likely. God did not approve of such treaties, and later they were strictly forbidden (Ex 23:32; 34:12; Deut 7:1,2). 'It is not improbable,' says Dr. Gill, 'that these men were religious men, and worshipped the same God with Abram, and such there were among the Canaanitish princes, of which Melchizedek, after spoken of, is an instance.'

2. In Egypt this church became corrupt

and degenerate (see: Ez 20:7,8). God brought his people out of that land and at Mount Sinai re-formed his church. He said: 'If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant . . . ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex 19:5,6). It is important to grasp that the covenant of grace already existed between God and certain believing individuals, such as Moses, Joshua and Caleb; but it was when the people of Israel entered God's covenant together that they became 'the church in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38).

3. A further renewal of this covenant took place forty years later when the people reached the plains of Moab and were about to cross the Jordan into the promised land. Although some of them had been present at Mount Sinai, it was only as children. The adult members of that generation had all died. Moses speaks to the new generation and says: 'The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb (Sinai). The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers (only) but with us (also), even us, who are all of us here alive this day' (Deut 5:2,3). God evidently desired a covenant relationship with them. They were required to profess openly their acceptance of God as their God. He would then declare them his people. The Bible tells us that they did affirm Jehovah to be their God. And it was then that Moses said to them: 'Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways. . . . And the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee . . .' (Deut 26:17,18 cf. 29:10-13). This covenant renewal ceremony meant the continuation of the church.

4. After this, whenever the church fell into decay and ruin, it was restored by entering the covenant afresh with God. This was what happened in the days of Josiah. 'The king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord . . . and he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers' (2 Ch 34:31,32). There are other examples in the days of Joshua (Josh 24:14-25), Asa (2 Ch 15:12-15), Joash (2 Ch 23:16-21), Hezekiah (2 Ch 29:10,11), Ezra (Ez 10:3-5), and Nehemiah (Neh 10:28,29). Richard Mather's comment is: 'If a church decayed is to be restored and reformed by renewing covenant with God, then it was instituted and erected at the first by way of covenant.'

5. God repeatedly warned the Israelites of what would happen if they did not adhere to the covenant (Lev 26:14-20; Deut 29:24-28) but he foretells, through the prophet Zechariah, that for the sin of rejecting his Son, the nation would be 'unchurched'. 'Then said I, I will not feed you: that that dieth, let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another. And I took my staff, even Beauty (Grace, or Favour), and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people (literally, 'peoples' – 'The Hebrew plural expresses the great numbers of the Israelite people formerly' (1 Kgs 14:20 (A. R. Fausset).... Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel (Zech. 11:9,10,14. Their rejection of Christ is mentioned in verses 12 and 13, cf Matt 26:14,15; 27:3-10). The breaking of the first staff signified the abolition of the church 'covenant'; the breaking of the second, the destruction of 'brotherhood' or 'fellowship'. It is clearly the covenant which makes a church. If there is no covenant, there can be no church.

6. Although the church of Israel was to cease, the prophets foretold how, in

gospel times, others would take the covenant and give being to a visible church.

Isaiah prophesied the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in converting grace. The converts, he said, would publicly bind themselves in covenant, professing an attachment both to God and his people. 'One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel' (Is 44:5). According to a later prophecy, this would involve not only 'foreigners' but also 'outcasts'. Certain people had always been excluded from the Jewish Church (Deut 23:1-6) but, in the age to come, even they would be able to 'take hold of God's covenant' (make the covenant their own, formally professing God as their covenant-God), and in this way be admitted into full church membership. 'Unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters' (Is 56:4,5; cf verses 6 and 7).

Jeremiah, in his prophecy, also spoke of the time when repentant believers, having experienced salvation, would want to covenant with God's church. 'They shall ask,' he said, 'the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves (or, mutually give ourselves) to the Lord in a perpetual (or, everlasting) covenant that shall not be forgotten' (Jer 50:5). John Cotton, in a sermon on this verse, argues convincingly for 'the necessity of a church covenant to the institution of a church. . . . The covenant of grace doth make a people, a joined people with God, and therefore a church of God.'

Ezekiel, the third and last of the major prophets, confirmed that in future days God would bring prospective church-members into covenant with himself. 'I will cause you,' said God through Ezekiel, 'to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant' (Ez 20:37). The underlying figure is that of a shepherd counting and examining sheep as they enter the fold (Lev 27:32; Jer 33:13; Mic 7:14). As shepherd, God will bring his people within the confines of the visible church but, in doing so, in infinite condescension, he will bind himself to them and them to him in covenant. This might well make them sing with Philip Doddridge:

To thee our souls we join,
And love thy sacred name;
No more our own, but thine,
We triumph in thy claim:
Our Father-King,
Thy covenant grace
Our souls embrace,
Thy glories sing.

7. In fulfilment of such prophecies, New Testament churches were formed by covenant. On the day of Pentecost, after Peter had preached the gospel, many 'received his word' and were 'baptised'. Then, as something quite distinct, they were 'added' to the church (Acts 2:41). What, we may ask, was the nature of this 'embodying' and 'in-churching'? Luke answers the question for us. He says in the next verse that 'they continued stedfastly . . .' (Acts 2:42). The word he uses strictly means to stick close to a person, particularly to a superior. Richard Rackham, commenting on the use of the word in another place in Acts, says that it means 'cleaving stedfastly to the Lord and one another'. On becoming members, they had given themselves to the Lord and to one another and, as they began, so they continued. The verse implies a church covenant.

8. Another expression used in Acts is that of 'joining' the church (Acts 5:13; 9:26). This does not simply mean adherence or regular attendance. The people in Acts 5 were already meeting

with the church (v 12), but what they dared not do was 'join' (v 13). Saul, in Acts 9, could have met with the church in Jerusalem – unbelievers sometimes did that (1 Cor 14:23-25) – but the problem arose when he wanted to 'join' the church (Acts 9:26). The word is important and highly significant. It expresses 'a close relationship entered by contract'. It is the word Christ uses about a man and his wife (Matt 19:6 – translated 'cleave'), and about an employer and his employee (Lk 15:15). Both uses indicate some kind of promissory engagement. We conclude that when the early Christians came openly into a covenant with God, it involved for them a bond of pact with one another, similar to the 'covenant of friendship' between David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:3; 20:8,42; compare 'the brotherly covenant' of Amos 1:19). 'This,' says John Owen, 'completes the confederation intended, which is the formal cause of the church, and without which, either expressly or virtually performed, there can be no church-state.'

9. When scattered believers of Cyprus and Cyrene began to preach the gospel at Antioch, the capital of the Roman province of Syria, many Gentiles were converted. 'The hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord' (Acts 11:21). News of this reached the Jerusalem church and Barnabas was sent 'to bring them further forward in the principles of faith; to set things in some certain order; to give the building which was begun some form, that there might be a lawful state of the Church' (John Calvin). In short, Barnabas was sent to establish a Christian church at Antioch. There were believers there, but no church as yet. Significantly, Luke uses the phrase 'the church which was in Jerusalem' (Acts 11:22), but he does not so describe the Christians in Antioch. They were not, at this time, united in church-fellowship. When Barnabas arrived, he saw the evidence of God's saving grace, and immediately he set about the work for which he had been sent. He 'exhorted them all (the whole company who believed), that with purpose of heart ('an intelligent, firm and deliberate resolution' – Matthew Henry) they would cleave unto the Lord (that is bind themselves in covenant to him) (cf Deut 10:20; 11:22; 30:29,30).' Having entered an open public covenant with God, these believers were constituted in Antioch as 'the church' (Acts 11:26).

10. The very nature of the local church requires a covenant. It is, as Paul reminds us, the bride of Christ. Writing to the Corinthian church, he says: 'I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ' (2 Cor 11:2). Now there is no 'espousal' but by contract. That contract is a covenant between two parties, binding them to each other. Hence we read of 'the wife of thy covenant' (Mal 2:14; cf Prov 2:17 – 'the covenant of her God', meaning the covenant which is of divine origin and sanction). If, then, a church is married to Christ, it must be by way of a covenant. It follows that all who unite in a church, and all who would unite in it, must accept the covenant.

In conclusion, I will mention the advantages of such a covenant:

1. It is a beautiful way for the church as a whole to express its love to the Lord.

2. It impresses upon all their spiritual responsibilities as well as the seriousness of their departures from God.

3. It has the effect of binding the church together in real and lasting unity.

4. It can move the Lord to manifest himself in a new way, answering this expression of devotion.

The Problem of Worldliness

by Jim van Zyl

Christopher Murray was confused and angry.

A final-year university student he was majoring in History and English with a view to teaching.

He was also grappling, for the umpteenth time, with the problem of worldliness. What really constituted a worldly action or attitude? What did the Bible really teach about this controversial subject?

There had been a time when none of this had bothered him.

He had been raised in a Christian home and community that held very strict and dogmatic views on the subject. So, when he first arrived at university he had all his do's and don'ts on worldliness neatly tabulated. He knew exactly what to avoid in order to reject the temptations of the world, and he was quite prepared to stand his ground. In fact, having such a set of strict rules to live by seemed to give him a sense of security. He did not have to think through a number of issues. He simply consulted his list and acted accordingly.

The Challenge

It was not long before he was deeply challenged.

He discovered a group of Christians (in a hostile, anti-Christian environment!) whose spiritual lives and devotion to Christ and evangelistic zeal were indisputable. Yet, their understanding of worldliness differed considerably from his.

Even more awkward was the fact that they were serious Bible students, unreservedly accepting the Bible as God's infallible Word. They constantly challenged him: 'But Chris, on which *Biblical principle* do you base your assertion that certain actions are worldly and others not?'

WHY HAVE A CHURCH COVENANT? *(continued from previous page)*

5. It can be solemnly renewed whenever the church feels in a low spiritual state or whenever it has reason to believe it has given offence to the Lord.

As to the way of entering into this covenant with other believers, an extract from the 17th century records of a church gathered together in Wykecroft, Axminster, will tell us all we need to know:

'The manner of this church's covenanting, and in all after renewals of covenant, was observed to be on solemn days of humiliation and prayer; and then after reading the covenant deliberately and distinctly in the audience of the congregation, each and every individual member subscribed, or by their voluntary consent had their names subscribed to the covenant; or, which was most usually practised, solemnly lifted up their right hand to heaven in testification of their real assenting to this covenant, and then subscribed with the hand.'

The group seemed far more concerned with motives, attitudes and tendencies of the Christian in his spirit and mind, than just obeying a list of rules. He noticed though that they had high moral standards, clear views on ethical principles and personal uprightness and integrity.

He also found himself challenged in the local evangelical church he attended off campus.

He had been raised on a diet of (sometimes, thunderous) denunciations directed against worldly entertainment and in particular attending the cinema. He knew those sermons so well that he could have written them out word for word. Now, however, he was coming under the influence of expository preaching, in which the preacher went through an entire book of the Bible or systematically preached through whole sections and chapters of various parts of the Bible. Gradually he began to see that one could not utilise individual texts as 'proof-texts' to settle an argument. You needed to understand the entire chapter or section of an epistle (for example) to get the one or two verses into their correct perspective. He began to understand broad, overall principles embedded in the teachings.

Now he was increasingly confronted in the preaching by the dangers of worldly dispositions and attitudes and motives: anger, greed, lust for power, ruthless ambition, materialism, racism, pride, business dishonesty, double standards. Chris found himself being forced to think on a far deeper level about worldliness, than he was used to. It was a painful experience: putting aside a lifetime's list of do's and don'ts, and starting to think in terms of Biblical principles.

A rather undramatic episode had nudged him to a further crisis point. As part of his English course he attended a screening of Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'. Chris was quite unprepared for the impact it had on him. He was deeply moved by the beauty of the English language, the plot visually unfolding and the total cinematic presentation. He mind was stretched, he was aesthetically moved, and he discovered – rather to his surprise – that viewing the film had not harmed him spiritually.

But, he was also angry.

In a recent letter from his mother she had said that she and his father were quite enjoying a current TV soap opera of the kitchen sink variety being screened nationwide. Having watched the first two or three episodes in the students' common room, Chris had come to the conclusion that the series was trivial, plastic, crude, shallow from an artistic and aesthetic point of view, and downright vulgar if not immoral. And this was what his 'separated' parents were enjoying!

He had written home immediately. How could they justify what they were doing? Had they not warned him never to enter a cinema to view even films such as 'Chariots of Fire'? What kind of double-standards were these?

Their answer was that they had not actually entered the local cinema in town, but were viewing this TV-series in the privacy of their own home. There was no real discussion of the Biblical principles Chris had raised. Real root-issues such as the disposition of the heart and the teaching of Paul in Philippians 4:8ff. 'Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things,' were replied to in a very cursory manner. His anger was understandable. What kind of piety prevented his parents and those in their community from attending the local cinema to view morally clean and acceptable films, but did not apparently prevent them from viewing dubious and unedifying TV-series in their homes?

Two verses contained in the letter from his parents only increased his frustration. The first was 2 Corinthians 6:16, 'Therefore come out from (among) them and be (ye) separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing . . .'. And to this verse his father had added James 4:4, 'You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred towards God'.

But were these words only applicable to him and not to them as well?

A breakthrough

The beginnings of a breakthrough in his understanding of Biblical worldliness came from an unexpected line of thought.

During one of the many Saturday afternoon sessions Chris and his friends had come to a common agreement on Galatians 5:19, where Paul lists the sins of the flesh: 'sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery: idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage etc'. These sins were unquestionably part of the spirit and ways of the 'world'.

'However,' one of the students present asked, 'what do you make of the following kind of person? Here is a man who is not blatantly guilty of the sins of the flesh listed in Galatians 5:19. On the contrary (although not a Christian), he is even-tempered, reasonable, cultured, a lover of art and music and good literature, sensitive to the needs of his fellow human beings, amiable, with many attractive characteristics. Now, would you class such a person as worldly?' He drew Chris' attention to the fact that they had just such a person on campus in the person of a very popular senior lecturer in English.

It was a new way of looking at the problem and Chris knew intuitively that the answer had to be 'Yes' – but he did not really know why.

'Yes,' he replied, 'but I don't honestly know why, or which Biblical principles apply here.'

Definitions

The above conversation led to the following definition and explanation.

'Worldliness,' his friend replied, 'is essentially a life organized and lived without taking God and his laws into account. A person (moral or immoral) is worldly

when that person has only *one reference point* in life and that is his or her own tastes, desires, pleasures, appetites, and decisions centralised and focused upon the world we live in.'

A man's appetites may be foully immoral and base, or nobly uplifting (as in the case of the senior lecturer), but they are both 'worldly'. Why? Because in both cases the appetites and desires function *only* for their own pleasure. In both cases the person's first and final reference point is: does it please me? Will it satisfy my desires and my wants? In other words we are back in the areas of spiritual disposition and bias and proclivity; back to attitudes and motives. Outwardly the one man may seem to be more worldly than the other man. But *at heart* there is no real, ultimate difference. This is the presupposition that underlies our Lord's words in Matthew 6:24. 'No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other . . .'

No man can have two reference points, God and himself!

Having set the scene I will now proceed further and show that in fact there are two basic positions which contrast with each other.

Two kinds of Christians

The Christian who holds to an extreme position on worldliness does so because of an inadequate understanding of the Bible's teaching on the subject.

Two such positions are relevant to us today: the legalistic Christian and the careless Christian.

The Legalistic Christian

This Christian sticks to a list of do's and don'ts rules in a rigid and mechanical manner. Rules not based upon Biblical passages that are quite clear (such as the Ten Commandments), but handed down from one generation to the next in a kind of 'evangelical tradition'; rules that are obeyed automatically and unthinkingly. Great stress is laid upon outward conformity amongst the Christians of such a community. Little effort is made to discover the Biblical principles relating to worldliness. That worldliness is a matter of attitudes and motives and dispositions remains nevertheless in the background.

The roots of this legalism stems largely, but not exclusively, from the Holiness Movements of the 19th Century. It has a two-fold emphasis.

On the one hand Christians were warned about 'the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does' (1 John 2:16). The Christians indulging in these sins were defined as *carnal* Christians. In some holiness movements it was taught that Christians could be delivered from such carnality by a total surrender to Christ as Lord (hitherto he had only been your Saviour). Such a surrender would be accompanied by the experience of *perfect love* through the Holy Spirit. In extreme cases it was taught that sin could be eradicated from the Christian altogether.

Furthermore, Christians were taught that worldliness was bound up in the Christian's outward relationship to the material world. The major emphasis lay in worldly entertainment, some games and certain kinds of sport, clothing, the use of cosmetics, an interest in art, literature, ballet, and drama and theatre. In some circles worldliness even extended to the wearing of coloured shirts (for men), the way you combed your hair, drinking coffee, and in the early part of this century the wearing of silk stockings (by ladies).

Worldliness, as defined above, was in the very nature of things viewed negatively. Separation was the watchword (2 Cor 6:14-18). Unless the Christian could tick off all ten or twelve or fifteen don'ts he was not living a 'separated' life. This position was so rigid in some instances that a fellow Christian's conversion was called into question if he or she did not live rigidly by the set of rules traditionally handed from parents to children.

This legalistic position had at least four serious consequences:

Firstly, there was (and still is) the danger of a mechanical understanding of sanctification. If you are conforming to the traditional set of rules then you are pleasing to the Lord and in good standing with your fellow Christians. Without even realizing it you slip into thinking that mere outward conformity equals Godly living. Holiness becomes the avoidance of certain attractions and actions and little more. There is little dynamic growth in spiritual maturity or growth in holiness in a positive manner.

Secondly, almost inevitably there was the danger that such legalism would breed spiritual snobbery and/or spiritual superiority. You might not say it in so many words, but you tended to pity the so-called worldly Christians who were much further down the ladder of holiness than you were.

Thirdly, a very large percentage of children raised on this diet of legalism rebelled (sometimes violently) when they were finally old enough to leave home and find a job or go to College or University. Freedom, to them, was sweet and they made up for lost time!

Fourthly, there was the danger of sheer hypocrisy. A classical example concerned purchasing a TV set. Many Christians simply refused to have this evil 'goggle-box' in their homes. They were at least consistent. Others, however, salved their consciences by buying TV sets that were ensconced in a wooden cabinet supplied with doors that could be kept shut while the set was not on. In this way the TV set was cunningly disguised to look like an ordinary piece of furniture!

But unhappily this hypocrisy also extended to the Christian's business world. Many pastors of that period (up to the early 50s) can still recall the amazing dichotomy that some Christians lived in. On Sundays they took a leading part in the various church activities displaying much piety and even Christian hospitality. But during the business week those same men (who rigidly enforced

rules against worldliness) seemed to take on another personality characterized by materialism, ruthlessness in business deals, ambition that knew few rules and, in some cases, less ethical behaviour than even the non-Christians displayed.

The Careless Christian

The inevitable reaction, as mentioned in my third observation above, came in the late 1950s and 1960s. A radical shift in the way worldliness was defined took place in the West (particularly North America), Europe (particularly Great Britain) – and in some Eastern Countries such as South Korea and Taiwan, and on the African continent in countries such as South Africa.

It is not going too far to assert that many Evangelicals simply did a U-turn in their Christian living and relation to the 'world'.

Today, from being too legalistically critical, many Christians are not careful enough about their relationship with the world. Many have adopted a laissez-faire attitude, both in their thinking and in their activities.

The two extremes, that is legalism and carelessness, are equally dangerous because they are both unscriptural and they both have disastrous consequences in a Christian's life.

For example, you find careless Christians who show very little discernment or discretion in the films they go to see, the books they read, the magazines they allow into their homes, the TV they watch (and allow their children to watch!), the theatre they attend or the music they purchase and listen to.

In their ignorance of Biblical teaching they take Paul's words that 'everything is permissible for me' (1 Cor 6:12 and 10:23), more literally than he ever intended. Sadder still are those Christians who gloat in their new-found freedom, on the basis that we no longer live under law but under grace. They confuse genuine liberty with license.

Increasingly the Christian constituency around the world is being infected by the 'spirit' of worldliness: the desire for material wealth (which has been given a boost by the so-called Prosperity Movement, see *The 'Gospel' of Prosperity – An Alien Gospel* by Gordon D. Fee, [*R.T.* 82]), happiness rather than sacrificial living, craving after status and position in the church, ambition and power, racism and class-consciousness, and, as Francis Schaeffer has pointed out – the slow, incipient infiltration of humanistic, relativistic and pragmatic principles into the Church itself.

One danger is more ominous than others, and that is the terrible danger of a *new spirit of Antinomianism* amongst evangelicals. There are only a few steps from careless Christianity to a Christianity characterised by Antinomianism!

Antinomianism is that view of life which maintains that the Christian is no

longer subject to the moral law as summed up in the Ten Commandments, for example.[1]

What could this mean in practice? How could Antinomianism be recognized? One of the first areas where warning lights should begin to flash would be a breakdown in morality: the toleration of pre-marital sex (no longer a rarity amongst young, untaught Christians who decide to 'shack up' together); justifying homosexuality; easing up on a stand against abortion; and the increasing acceptance of divorce on grounds other than adultery by one party (cf. Matt 19:9).

There is no question that some of the early adherents of the Jesus Movement, lacking in teaching, succumbing to heady emotionalism and with their peculiar view of physical embrace to show their spiritual love for each other, drifted into 'free love'. A bizarre example of this is the case of the Children of God under the leadership of David 'Moses' Berg who went so far as to utilise sex in order to win people for the cult.

And in case we think that we are beyond such backsliding, if not apostacy, let us recall the solemn warning of the Risen Christ to the Church at Pergamum. After noting their faithfulness to himself, he adds: 'Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by *committing sexual immorality* (Rev 2:14). So widely accepted was this in Pergamum that Christ threatens to wage warfare against them if they do not repent. This was tantamount to a threat to shut the church down!

The Biblically balanced position: 'No!' to both extremes

The truly Scriptural, and therefore Christian position, is not a mosaic of thoughts consisting (on the one hand) of a measure of legalism seasoned (on the other hand) with a dash of *incipient antinomianism.* The first is clearly not built upon a clear understanding and interpretation of Scriptural principles, and is consequently an inadequate and misleading basis. The second, on the other hand, is equally inadequate and wrong because it is based upon a misconception of the relation between grace and law.

To both these positions the Biblical Christian must respond with a resounding 'No!'.

There is much of the world's creative culture and entertainment and recreation that we can legitimately enjoy. At the same time however, the Christian is

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[1] The word comes from two Greek words, *anti* which means 'against', and *nomos* which means 'law'. It was coined by Martin Luther when an old friend of his, John Agricola (1492-1566), began teaching that Christians are entirely free from the moral law as laid down by Moses. Christians, he argued, are not required to keep the Ten Commandments. He adopted this view for fear that some Christians may come to believe that they needed 'the works of the law' to make them righteous, wrongly thinking that 'justification by faith alone' demanded this. The Reformers position is summed up by Patrick Hamilton: 'Good works make not a good man, but a good man (i.e. a sinner justified by faith) doeth good works,' cf. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, Baker Book House, 1960 ed., pp. 48-49).

instructed always to say 'No!' to the *spirit of 'worldliness'* as well as a careless attitude to that spirit.

Two passages will be helpful here. In Psalm 104, the psalmist praises God for his own splendour and majesty, as well as the creation he has given man to enjoy: 'He makes the grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate – bringing forth food from the earth: *wine* that gladdens the heart of man, *oil* to make his face shine, and *bread* that sustains his heart' (Ps 104:15-16). Without entering into the problem of abstinence from alcoholic drinks or not, it is quite clear that there are aspects of the world in which we live which we can legitimately enjoy. That is the basic principle that underlies these verses, and indeed the whole psalm.

There is no contradiction with the above when Paul exhorts Christians to say no to worldliness: 'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions' (Tit 2:11).

Three Guidelines in Decision-making

1. *There is a mechanical legalism the Christian should reject*
Instantly to classify some action as 'worldly' because it is traditional to do so because of your upbringing, is not a sign of spiritual maturity, but the very opposite.

Apart from the sins of the flesh (Gal 5:19), Paul very rarely deals with actual examples of what he would classify as 'worldly'. He never, for example, instructs Christians not to attend athletics meetings, chariot races (at the Circus Maximus, if you lived in Rome), gladiatorial contests or war games (such as were staged at the Colosseum in Rome, and other towns and cities which had large Roman populations).

One such rare exception is found in 1 Timothy 2:9, where he says, 'I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God'.

I do not believe that Paul was handing down a blanket condemnation of all jewellery and various hairstyles. (If he did then we had better be consistent and get rid of our engagement and marriage rings, brooches and perhaps even our watches!)

Paul is seeking to establish *a principle of sobriety and propriety in dress.*

2. *There is a clear separation from worldliness taught in Scripture*
There is a Sodom and Gomorrah to stay out of. There is a Babel with all its pride and arrogance to avoid. Grace has not lowered our moral and ethical standards. It has heightened them.

Firstly, we look at this principle as we find it, in *the Old Testament.* This separation is taught in the separation of Israel from the surrounding pagan nations: 'I am the Lord your God, who has set you apart from the nations' (Lev 20:23). If this was God's command to physical, ethnic Israel, how much more does it not apply to spiritual Israel.

A classic illustration of the Biblical concept of worldliness and of the correct and incorrect relation to it is found in the story of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 13, 14 and 19.

In those chapters we see Abraham rejecting the acquisition of land, status, wealth, power and prestige in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Tragically we see Lot saying 'Yes!' to the attractions of the two cities and the business opportunities in the cities, thus revealing a spirit of worldliness already existing in his heart and mind.

Worldliness had gripped Lot's heart long before he finally moved into the actual geographical locality of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13:10). Lot *saw* the well watered plain of the Jordan and went and pitched his tents near Sodom. The word *'saw'* cannot be limited to factual, optical observation. Lot looked, as it were, with the cravings and desires of his heart. No, he was not yet in the *world* of Sodom, but already the world of Sodom was *in* him!

The Biblical principle of worldliness, that is having as reference point only what pleases us and is centred in the world around us, was already dominant in Lot's heart and mind. Even though he was not yet *physically in Sodom,* he was already there in spirit and disposition.

To revert back to Chris Murray's parents for a moment. They had not physically entered the local cinema, but they betrayed the worldliness of their hearts by the quality of the programmes they watched on TV, even if this was done within the confines of their home. The spirit of the world cannot be shut out by the closing of a door or the drawing of curtains.

The Scriptural teaching of worldliness as being primarily that disposition of the heart is further ironically underlined by the fact that Abraham was a very wealthy man: 'Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold' (Gen 13:2). The difference with Abraham was that his worldly wealth and power and standing was not *in his heart,* dominating it. This shines through the amazing offer he makes to Lot: 'Go on Lot, you choose first. I'll take what's left over' (Gen 13:8-9).

Henceforth their paths ran in two very different and dramatic directions. Lot, beset by a worldly spirit, craves for more of this world's riches, yet ends up *losing* everything: his home, his wealth, his place of honour at the city gate, his wife, his family life and his own chastity and purity (Gen 19).

Abraham pleases and honours God with an anti-worldly spirit. And the consequence? He *gains* a vast geographical area and the promise that a remarkable nation (God's own people) will come forth from his seed: 'I will make your

offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted' (Gen 13:16).

Secondly, we observe *the New Testament teaching.* The distinction between the world and the Christian is one of the overt themes in our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–7:29). There is the 'worldly' way of revenge, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth but there is also the Christian way of forgiveness and the turning of the other cheek. The 'world' incites us to hate our enemies; our Lord instructs us to love our enemies. The pagans are filled with anxiety of the future, the Christian knows that his Heavenly Father cares for him. There is the wide gate and the narrow gate; the good and bad fruit, the house built upon sand and the house built upon the rock.

The Apostle John puts it this way, in chapter 2, verse 15 of his first letter: 'Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.'

In Romans 6:1-4, Paul argues that since the Christian has been united to Christ in both his death and resurrection, he is now alive to God through Christ and must accordingly live a new life that is radically different to the world's way of life.

The Apostle Paul writes to Titus in chapter 2:11-14: 'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.'

Paul, here perhaps taking his cue from our Lord's words in John 17:15-16, is very realistic. We do live *in* this present age *in* this world. But into the world God's grace has entered epitomised in the salvation worked out on the cross by our Lord Jesus Christ. This has a two-fold consequence. Negatively we are to say a very loud 'No!' to all forms of ungodliness and worldly passions. Positively, we are to live lives characterised by self-control, uprightness and godliness. And why are we to live like this? A further negative and positive is involved. Our Lord's redemptive work was to redeem us from all wickedness (the negative), and to purify us in an ongoing process of sanctification (the positive).

The starkest exhortation to separation from worldliness is perhaps the famous words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. Paul sets the Christian over against the non-Christian and his world in a series of antithetical questions: 'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common?... light and darkness? Christ and Belial?... a believer... with an unbeliever?... the temple of God and idols?... Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'

Clearly the NT does not condone a laissez-faire kind of Christianity.

3. *In the Christian's relation to the world there is a point beyond which the Christian dare not go.*

Military men describe particularly dangerous areas as Red Areas, Red Zones or No-go Areas.

For the Christian there are areas associated with the world that should be permanent Red Zones or No-go Areas. Areas about which there should be no argument, whatever Evangelical denomination or church we belong to.

Such areas include the sins of the flesh Paul describes in Galatians 5:19: 'The acts of the sinful nature . . . sexual immorality, impurity . . . hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions . . . envy . . .' All these are actions which betray a 'worldly' spirit and spring from a heart not right with God.

A Christian may pride himself on avoiding the world's places of entertainment or the drinking of champagne at a wedding reception. But he may be a jealous husband, or given to bouts of irritation and uncontrollable anger. He may be impatient with his employees, so much so that they continually fear him. He may be consumed with an ambition to reach the top of his profession and in the process ruthlessly trample underfoot others to achieve his object. Or a Christian woman may have her whole world-outlook coloured by a crippling envy for the wealth and success that another Christian possesses. Such Christians are thoroughly 'worldly' at heart, even though they may be living within the strict boundaries of their traditional 'non-worldly' activities.

In Ephesians 4:17–5:7, Paul adds to the catalogue a further list of things, all of which breathe the spirit of worldliness. He warns the Christians (note that!) to put off: 'Falsehood . . . anger . . . stealing . . . unwholesome talk . . . bitterness, rage . . . brawling and slander . . . malice . . . greed . . . foolish talking or coarse joking . . .'

To sum up

There are some films, which no Christian should see or support, some books which no Christian should read, some magazines which should not enter any Christian's home, some TV series that no Christian should watch, some music that no Christian should have in his home. In other words, there are *some* areas of the 'world's' culture, the 'world's' entertainment, the 'world's' media, the 'world's' practices that are so polluting and contaminating that they should be permanent Red Zones, and to which with a *permanent* 'No!' must always be said.

I stress the word *some* because I do not believe that the Bible casts a blanket condemnation over the totality of this world's culture and activities. The common grace of God is still operative and there are areas of the world which the Christian can enjoy without endangering his spiritual life or his relation to the Lord.

Medical doctors and surgeons rarely complain about their work. Their calling is to attend to the sick. Likewise pastors or elders are called to attend to those who are spiritually ill. This work can be extremely demanding. The temptations that come to the weary pastor are many. He may doubt his own ability. He may mistrust his personality and think himself inadequate. He may fear that his stamina is running out. This may lead him to question his entire vocation to the ministry. Jeremiah's tenacity is designed to strengthen the determination not only of leaders but among Christians who are enduring affliction.

Perseverence in the ministry The example of Jeremiah

Jeremiah's character is more fully portrayed than any other Old Testament prophet. The detail provided enables us to enter in to his reactions, disappointments, depressions and prayers.

At the outset he was called to be the prime witness to a nation moving rapidly forward toward destruction. He was appointed to be the preacher to an apostate people. Jeremiah had the difficult work of declaring God's judgement upon them and to warn them of the severity of it by sword, starvation, siege and exile for the remnant (Jer 15:2). He was forbidden to pray for them (11:14, 14:11). He was not permitted to socialise with them (16:5). The prophet was also forbidden to marry (16:2). He never enjoyed what we would call ministerial success. His message was disobeyed and scorned throughout his ministry. Even at the end when he prophesied disaster for a group if they decided to go to Egypt they mocked his counsel and said that they preferred to serve the Queen of Heaven than the God of Judah.

For our benefit we need to examine, 1. The nature of Jeremiah's conflict, 2. The means which insured his survival, 3. Perseverance as the outstanding lesson from the life of Jeremiah.

The nature of Jeremiah's conflict
In order to understand the role of Jeremiah we should compare his work as a prophet to that of Christ. Jeremiah's ministry preceded the first destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem, Christ's, the final demolition of the Temple in AD70. As we now follow his life we will see a downward spiral of conditions getting worse and worse which will point us to the kind of struggle that beset Jeremiah.

Jeremiah was called to his work when he was about 20 (1:6), and continued for about 40 years. He began in the 13th year of Josiah's reign. After the battle of Megiddo when King Josiah was killed, Jehoiakim came to the throne. This made life much more difficult for Jeremiah. Jehoiachin followed, then

Zedekiah, and with him the prophet's severest afflictions. Deportations of the people began in 597 just 10 years before the final downfall. Jeremiah continued to predict the destruction of Jerusalem and as a consequence was thrown in prison and then into a cistern or pit where he sank down in the mud. By a timely and courageous intervention he was rescued by Ebed Melech, a court official from Ethiopia (38:6-9). Because he came from Ethiopia we presume he was black which is encouraging because we rejoice whenever the truth of God unites the races and brings harmony.

The last we hear of Jeremiah's prophetic voice is from Egypt where he was taken against his will. Faithful to the end, he was not to know that the prophecies he was commanded to write down (36:2) would become a staple diet of those taken into exile, and an important part of the canon of Scripture.

We can see from this brief survey that Jeremiah had to endure a battle which terminated in defeat. If a person knows that a reward lies at the end of the road then he has the motivation to continue. If soldiers are assured that they will win the war even though they have lost several battles they may be prepared to continue. From the very outset Jeremiah was told that disaster lay ahead. Judah would be taken captive. Jeremiah was given that task of proclaiming the sin and guilt of the people. He had to tell them that they had broken the covenant irrevocably (11:1-8). When we think of the contempt the people showed for his message and their attachment to the overwhelming majority of false prophets who were diametrically opposed to Jeremiah, we can appreciate the difficulty of his calling (14:13-16, 26:8). For instance Pashhur chief officer of the Temple had Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks (20:2); the people of his own village at Anathoth plotted to murder him (11:18). So intense was the prophet's anguish that he wished to die. He cursed the day he was born (20:14). In the face of so much opposition and disappointment he needed great determination and perseverance. These attributes were given to him. God said he would make Jeremiah a fortified city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall.

The means which insured his survival

What were the means by which Jeremiah survived the ordeal of his ministry? In his spiritual anguish the prophet lives by faith in the truth of God's Word and sustained himself by a close walk with God. Those who have suffered prolonged acute pain are often driven close to God and experience intimate and prolonged communion as a result. He did not hesitate to describe his sorrow. 'Oh, the agony of my heart!' he cried (4:19). Jeremiah freely expressed his sorrows in prayer, 'I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me' (20:7).

On one occasion the prophet said of Jahweh that his was a deceptive brook, a spring that fails. For that he was required to apologize (20:18, 19). We must not abuse the freedom we have in prayer.

Some who profess to be Christians build their lives around their friends. If those relationships sour then the whole of their spiritual life seems to fall apart. The

reason is that instead of building on the foundation of Scripture and the Triune God, therein revealed they build their lives around human beings all of whom are sinful and frail. Sometimes the mistake is to attach one's affections to a relative or to a pastor. That is unwise and dangerous. Probably the most common mistake is for a wife to depend spiritually upon her husband, or the other way around, the husband on the wife. If the partner is taken the one left never seems to recover. Christ alone is strong enough and able to sustain our spiritual lives. The Scriptures say, 'No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Cor 3:11).

Jeremiah enjoyed the constant and reliable friendship of his helper and scribe, Baruch, but there is no doubt that communion with Jahweh was the main pillar of his life. It almost seems as if there was a two-way conversation. An example is seen in chapter 32, where no sooner has Jeremiah completed his wonderful prayer of faith (note how he begins, 32:17) than the Word of the Lord comes to him. We admire the fact that it is the Word of the Lord and not just Jeremiah's feelings because the Lord's Word is marked with absolute authority and certainty. The predictive element is outstanding and in each case was fulfilled infallibly.

At times Jeremiah longed to give up the fight and escape to some pleasant place of quiet and peace (9:2). He was tempted to stop his work and not speak any more in God's name, but found the Jahweh's Word was in his heart like a burning fire, shut up in his bones (20:9).

It was the truth that kept Jeremiah and gave him strength. We can well ask whether the prophet ever had any joy or pleasure. Was he not miserable all the time? He answers that himself when he declared:

> *When your words came, I ate them;*
> *They were my joy and my heart's delight,*
> *for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty (15:16).*

Jeremiah was fully aware of his privilege. He enjoyed great authority and certainty which is reflected in his consistent preaching. He predicted the coming of the Messiah (23:5, 6). Three full chapters expound the new covenant that was to come. The section chapters 31-33 is referred to as, 'The Book of Promise'.

Perseverance the outstanding lesson from the life of Jeremiah
It seems strange that as circumstances became worse and worse, Jeremiah became better and better. The darker the times became the more cogent and detailed were his prophecies. Jeremiah's ministry is an outstanding model of perseverance. His spiritual pain increased and finally is given expression in the book of Lamentations which describes his intense sorrow at the scenes of desolation in the destruction of Jerusalem. The key to the prophet's amazing tenacity is beautifully expressed in these words of faith and love:

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness,
I say to myself, The Lord is my portion; therefore
I will wait for him (Lam 3:22-24).

Jeremiah's power to persevere is declared at the beginning. God instilled courage into him, 'Today *I have made you* – a fortified city an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land' (1:18). We may have to persevere through dark times like Jeremiah did. Note the similarity of our time with his. The majority of the people did not care. They were indifferent to spiritual truth and spiritual reality. The religion that there was consisted of empty ceremony (6:20). Elaborate ritual is never a substitute for obedience to the teaching of the Word of God. Just as people today think that because they were baptised as infants all is well, so the men thought that all was well because they had been circumcised as infants. Without spiritual birth or renewal that circumcision was worthless (9:24, 25).

The steadfastness of God's prophet, his unwavering loyalty to the truth and his dedication to the people, despite their unfaithfulness, is an outstanding example to us.

It is more likely that the perseverance we need is of a different kind. It may be the struggle against illness or physical weakness. Paul declares that even though our bodies 'are wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day' (2 Cor 4:16). Never underestimate the spiritual resources of the man of faith.

Instead of complaining about suffering or grumbling about it we must recognise that it is designed to produce perseverance in us (Rom 5:3, 4). Perseverance in turn strengthens character. This is so clearly seen in the life of Jeremiah. Our own personal struggle may be economic, an uphill battle that never seems to end, or it may be family problems or personal relationships in which there is the temptation to think that nobody else could possibly understand. Whatever the nature of the struggle it is helpful to remember that perseverance is something that is developed. The illustration of the marathon runner is instructive (Heb 12:1). No man can simply go and run 26 miles. Training for such an event is hard, long and exacting. The whole lifestyle is affected and flabby physical habits have to be eradicated. A mentality of grit and determination has to be built in. When Jeremiah complained that the pace was too fast the Lord said, 'If you have races with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage the thickets by the Jordan?' (12: 5, 6).

The writings of Jeremiah often encourage Christians, ministers and missionaries who have to endure long periods of hard work with little evidence of fruitfulness. Vital to our appreciation of Jeremiah's perseverance is that he

Permissiveness and Christian Practice

Bob Sheehan

Permissiveness needs to be defined. Its slogans since the 1960s have included 'Free Love', 'Do your own thing', 'Anything goes' and 'Do what comes naturally'. The implications of these slogans are that no-one and nothing has authority over me. The authority of God, of the Church, the State, School, parents, even one's marriage partner is totally rejected as having no value. The slogan that sums it all up is 'I Rule whether it's okay or not'.

The applications of permissiveness are many. The application to God is practical atheism. Fundamentally there are two types of atheism: there are those who theoretically reject the idea of God, and there are those who live as if there is no God. The latter is practical atheism, and it is presented to us in Scripture (Ps 14:1-3).

The applications of the permissive principle to the state are lawlessness, strife, riot and revolution. No age in the history of Israel was more permissive than the age of the Judges. The principle rule of practice in the age of the Judges is summed up for us in the phrase 'everyone did as he saw fit in his own eyes' (Judg 21:15).

The application of permissiveness to the home means the overthrow of the divine order. The functional difference that Scripture recognises between man and woman, husband and wife, parent and child is overthrown. Feminism, child abuse, lack of natural affection, divorce, adultery, all these things are consequences of the application of the permissive principle to the home.

The application of permissiveness to sexuality means the return to the old idea that divorce can be for any and every reason (Matt 19:3). The adulteress and prostitute become a part of the accepted life of society (Prov 5-7). The rapist and the perverted become a part of everyday life (2 Sam 13; Judg 19; Rom

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PERSEVERANCE IN THE MINISTRY *(continued from previous page)*

was an optimist as to the long term future of God's cause. The prophet described a glorious future for the redeemed. He was certainly strengthened and sustained by the promises. In The Book of Promises (chap 31-33) we have this gem 'I will never stop doing good to them' (32:40). We have come into the fulfilment of that promise. Therefore let us be stedfast like Jeremiah and persevere faithfully through our difficulties.

In times of barrenness both pastors and churches have often turned to unbiblical or shallow methods of attracting people and have bypassed the necessity of repentance (6:14). Jeremiah refused to compromise or to agree to compromise (8:11). He pointed the people back to 'the ancient paths' (6:16). In our perseverance we must stick to the rules and precepts of God's Word.

Surely Jeremiah's example as one who persevered is for our inspiration and good. Let us persevere in the work to which we have been called.

1:24, 26 and 27). The consequence of the principle of permissiveness in the society of any nation is terror, mob rule, insecurity, abortion, VD, AIDS, the cheapening of life and the destruction of society. Where everyone says 'I Rule' no-one, in fact, rules, and anarchy in every area of life results.

When we turn specifically to the whole area of permissiveness in the realm of sexuality, what are the pressures on the Christian?

Firstly, permissiveness is directed towards sexual desire. Now sexual desire in and of itself is a good thing. It is a gift of God. Our Lord reminds us that it was God Himself who made man at first male and female (Matt 19:4), and that it was God who instituted marriage (Gen 2:24). This marriage involved not only the separation of a husband and wife from their previous family and the formation of a new unit, but it also involved a sexual relationship: the two became one flesh (Gen 2:24). The writer of the Proverbs is concerned that his readers should not undervalue or underestimate the legitimate sexuality that God has granted to them and so he tells us that amongst the things that amaze him is the way of a man with a maiden (Prov 30:19).

Sexuality and sexual desire, in themselves then, are not to be disdained, but permissiveness is directed towards *sinful* use of sexual desire. There is the pressure on the Christian of his own natural tendencies and desires, which are God-given, and the use of these tendencies and desires in a way that is lustful and sinful. It is this that creates such a powerful combination. We are warned in Scripture of the power of the conflict between the spirit and the flesh and in this area of sexual immorality the pressures of that conflict can be very great (Gal 5:17ff).

Secondly, permissiveness is made to sound reasonable. This, of course, has always been the method of Satan. When we return to the third chapter of Genesis we find that Satan argues with Eve that the reason why God does not want her to eat of the tree is because he wants to inhibit her and limit her from becoming as knowledgeable as him. Satan's whole approach is one of reasoning out why she should disobey God.

In the area of sexual permissiveness a great deal of emphasis is placed upon reason. We are told 'you have to be compatible before you marry a person and that compatibility has to include sexual compatibility, so you really have got to sleep together, not just once but often to make sure you are completely compatible'. Or, 'homosexuality comes naturally to him, so how can it be wrong to be natural?' Others argue, 'as long as you love a person it is not a matter of lust, is it, and the Bible is only opposed to lust'. It all sounds so very, very reasonable. But the reasoned arguments of *men* cannot replace the revealed will of *God.*

Thirdly, permissiveness is widespread. Christian girls can sometimes be the only girls not on the Pill in their Nurses' Home, in their set at University and, increasingly, in their class at school. The pressure on the Christian then is not to be different. Men like to be sheep; like sheep they like to go astray (Is 53:6). Peer pressure, the pressure of those of our own age and sex, can be very great. Even those who are in mature adult life face this. In our Lord's Day we are told of those who did believe in him but would not publicly profess this because they loved the praise of men rather than the praise of God (John 12:42-43).

It is a very difficult thing for a young person in a permissive society to be thought of as odd. A young man may have his virility questioned. He may

indeed be viewed and slandered as a coward. He may even have suggestions made that the reason why he will not sleep around with every girl that comes along is because his own tendencies are towards homosexuality. If a girl will not be promiscuous like her friends she can be thought of as a coward, a cissy, a baby, a prig.

Of course, opposing permissiveness and resisting its temptations is not an easy path. We are told in Genesis 39 that Joseph was constantly baited by Potiphar's wife as she sought to seduce him and offer him her bed. He had to resist time and time again. Ultimately, in resisting her, he brought himself into great trouble and even into prison. But that was the price for him of rejecting permissiveness and following the Lord.

The Christian is called to show the attitude of Moses who chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season (Heb 11:25). It is perhaps particularly important to note that the writer of the Hebrews acknowledges that sin is pleasurable. Sin is attractive. It is enjoyable. Yet the Christian must sometimes reject the path which is pleasurable and enjoyable because it is not the path that God has ordained.

Fourthly, permissiveness is presumptuous. Many people consider that to sleep together is as natural a part of going out as holding hands or a goodnight kiss or two. In the modern situation an acceptance of an invitation to go back home is assumed to be 'loaded' and this is why there is much danger in relationships which do not have the same Christian standards. This very presumption on the part of the permissiveness is the basis on which Judges argue that in rape cases 'no' means 'yes'. To many people such a statement is preposterous but it is a consequence of permissive thinking. The idea is that everybody wants to be promiscuous and, therefore, any type of invitation that is given can be taken up.

One Christian girl reported how she was on a cross-channel ferry and was approached by one of the crew to go downstairs and have a cup of coffee with him and with some of his friends. In her innocence she agreed. When she got down below she found herself not ushered into some mess room for a cup of coffee but into a bedroom for other purposes. She was able to keep calm and to keep speaking all the way across the Channel and avoid what the sailor clearly had in mind. He acted in that way because permissiveness is presumed.

Fifthly, permissiveness is imperialistic. People who live to please themselves are pretty determined to get their own way. Many people now expect sex as a payment of favours. One soldier offered to go to a dance with a girl if she would, in turn, go to bed with him. If she would not give him what he wanted he would not give her what she wanted. Single girls who go hitchhiking have to understand that there are those who believe that the proper payment for giving a girl a lift is to give sexual favours in return.

Sixthly, permissiveness controls society of which we are part. We know that. Contraception and abortion are freely available. The risk of permissiveness can be minimised, and if risks are taken and fail, then the damage that has been done can soon be sorted out at a clinic. The great temptation, the very temptation that David fell into, is to try and get away with sin (2 Sam 11), but as he found to his great cost, God knows (2 Sam 12).

Why then should Christians reject permissiveness?

Firstly, Christians should reject permissiveness because its basic tenet is

untrue. The Scriptures teach us that we are creatures subject to God. We do have authority over us. We were not only made *by* Christ but *for* Christ (Col 1:16). We do have a Law-giver and a Judge (Jas 4:12). We are required by God to love him with the whole of our being. The fact that God makes requirements of us demonstrates that we are creatures and that we have laws to obey. The permissive view of a rule-free world and the Christian view of a God-ruled world are mutually contradictory.

Secondly, we should reject permissiveness because God approves of behaviour that the permissive rejects. The permissive reject the authority of the state but God upholds it. He requires us to be submissive to the governing authorities and to pay them our taxes (Rom 13:1-7). Permissiveness rejects the marriage structure and the family, but God instituted and approves of it (Gen 2:20-24; Heb 13:4). The state, marriage, the family are pleasing to God and they are ordained by him. What God approves, the permissive reject. We must, therefore, reject permissiveness and accept the rule of God.

Thirdly, Christians must reject permissiveness because God rejects what the permissive approves. We are told of the Corinthian church that some of them had been adulterers, sexually immoral, homosexual offenders of one sort or another, but that was *in the past*; now they had been washed, sanctified, and justified through the work of Christ and the Spirit (1 Cor 6:9-11). The writer of the Proverbs warns his son against becoming mixed up with the adulteress and the prostitute because theirs is a way that leads to death (Prov 5-7). The prophet Malachi condemns the loose attitude to divorce that was prevailing because God hates divorce (Mal 2:15-16). We are quite clearly taught in these passages of Scripture that there are eternal consequences attached to permissive behaviour and, therefore, the Christian must reject what the permissive approves because God rejects it.

Fourthly, the Christian must reject permissiveness because the body of the Christian belongs to God. In the passage 1 Corinthians 6:12-21, Paul teaches us that our bodies have a relationship to each member of the Trinity. We are told that it is God who has bought our bodies so that we do not any longer own them. They are his by redemption price – the redemption price of the blood of Christ (1 Cor 6:19-20). In addition to this, our bodies are united to Christ as members of his body. Our spiritual union with Christ includes the reception of our bodies by him as part of that which he has redeemed (1 Cor 6:15). We are also told that our bodies have become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). As such they are holy temples which are to be kept holy and used for God.

The Christian must also reject permissiveness because he is subject to judgement. We cannot live or die independently from our relationship to the Lord (Rom 14:7-9). We are accountable to God for how we live (Rom 14:10-12). This accountability and the prospect of our judgement as Christians, even though we do not have condemnation, should, nevertheless, be a serious restraint on our behaviour and a reason for shunning sin.

Sixthly, the Christian should reject permissiveness because permissiveness brings its own penalties. Permissiveness is simply sin dressed up in another form and permissiveness leads to death (Rom 8:6-8).

In addition to these eternal consequences there are temporal consequences. Immorality has its own effects just as drunkenness leads to a hangover. When people are handed over to their own

immoral desires (Rom 1:24, 26 and 27) it results in their receiving the penalty of their wickedness in their own body. It is the promiscuous who pass on VD. It is the perverted who pass on AIDS. Not only are there these physical consequences but there are psychological and spiritual consequences. David's permissiveness led him to a period of deep remorse and to a painful hard spiritual path of repentance. We only have to read the account of his sufferings and we soon realise the terrible struggles that he went through because of his sin (Ps 51).

The Scripture tells us also that sexual immorality is a unique sin (1 Cor 6:18). Many other sins involve our abusing our bodies externally, using drugs or drink or something else to abuse the body with, but sexual immorality is a unique sin because the body itself is used as a weapon of sin. The psychological and spiritual effects of sexual immorality are also very great. There is a sense of guilt and defilement which is often quite unique in its strength. A person who persists in a path of sexual sinfulness often has a sense of personal filth and pollution, a sense of dissoluteness, an enslavement to sin which reduces him to an animal craving to have lust fulfilled.

The path of sexual immorality which is, so often, declared to be the path of liberation and freedom brings with it an awful penalty in the bodies and minds of men and women. It corrupts, it depraves, it destroys because it is an abuse of what God has given for the blessing and enjoyment of his people within definite marital bounds.

For these reasons then Christians should reject the temptations that come their way from a permissive world and all of us need to ask ourselves three questions:

1. Have we been washed, sanctified and justified from our sins? (1 Cor 6:9-11). The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ does not simply come to us to condemn us for our sins but to save us from it.

2. If we have indeed been washed, sanctified, justified, have we lapsed back into sexual sin? Do we need deliverance from it? The example of David in 2 Samuel 11 and 12 and in Psalm 51 shows us that there is a path of repentance for the child of God back from sexual sin.

Thirdly, are we keeping ourselves from sexual sin? 1 Corinthians 10 tells us to flee immorality. We cannot just be indifferent towards it, we must run from it and run to God that we might walk in his ways.

Carey Conference for Ministers

High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Herts. — November 26th-28th, 1985

Speakers: Donald MacLeod, Don Garlington, Bob Sheehan, Geoff Thomas, Victor Budgen, David Kingdon.

Subjects: Adam and the effects of his sin — Bob Sheehan; The theology of Feminism — David Kingdon; The sense of God in worship — Victor Budgen; Valuable lessons from the lives of Lester Roloff and Rolfe Barnhard — Geoff Thomas; The Last Adam and the World to come — Don Garlington.

Suggestions were made about subjects in *RT*84 (front inside cover) but to find those who have the time to research the materials is not easy. The subjects above are fairly certain.

For details write to John Rubens, 10 Glebe Road, WELWYN, Herts.

R. F. Gates, Southern Baptist Evangelist, preaching at the Conference

The Third Southern Baptist Founders' Conference

by John F. Thornbury

Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee was the site for the third Southern Baptist Founders' Conference from 30th July-2nd August, 1985. The sprawling campus with its massive Gothic buildings, all grey stone, provided a delightful spot for a spiritual feast. Some 150 people, mostly pastors and their wives, from 28 states and one foreign country were registered.

The purpose of this conference is to provide a rallying point for Southern Baptists who hold to the doctrines of grace. The name is a reminder of a fact long known, though seldom emphasized by students of Baptist history, that at the time of the establishing of the Southern Baptist Convention about 130 years ago the theological sentiment of Southern Baptists was overwhelmingly Calvinistic. This is certainly true of such pastors as W. B. Johnson, first president of the S.B.C.; R. B. C. Howell, second president of the S.B.C.; Jeremiah Bell Jeter, one of the founders of the Southern Baptist Seminary and preacher of the fourth annual sermon, in 1851; and Basil Manly Sr., president of the domestic mission board. Accredited Southern Baptist theologians during this period, such as J. L. Dagg and James Boyce were Calvinists.

The 'founding fathers' of the Southern Baptist convention receive their due honour in all current Baptist encyclopaedias and seminary classrooms. It may come as a surprise, however, to many to realize that a growing number of Baptists in the 1980s are taking their theology seriously. The great doctrines of the New Testament which were re-established by the Protestant Reformation are being reaffirmed.

The subjects chosen for the speakers at this year's conference provided a nice balance between the doctrinal, devotional, and evangelistic aspects of the Christian life. All of the messages were Christ-centred and were preached with an emphasis on

the practical application of the truth to the Christian life. Nine of the addresses consisted of expositions of Scripture; three brought a historical perspective. I would class six as primarily doctrinal, two as devotional, three historical, and one as hortatory.

The person and work of Christ was the theme of pastors Joe Nesom of the First Baptist Church of Jackson, La., and David Miller, director of missions of the Little Red River Baptist Association of Arkansas. The former emphasized the three offices of Christ, using texts from John 12, Matthew 6 and Deuteronomy 18. The latter preached Wednesday night on 'God's Provision in Christ' from Romans 8:32-34 and Thursday night on 'The Lordship of Christ' from Colossians 1:15-20. Those who heard these sermons were well fed from the cupboards of orthodoxy.

Dr. John Pretlove, a teacher in the Criswell Center for Theological Studies in Dallas, Texas, gave two excellent messages on God's work in regeneration, which brings the believer into union with Jesus Christ through faith. On Wednesday afternoon he expounded the classic Baptist view that the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit' of 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Galatians 3:27 is neither water baptism (sacramentalism is thus demolished) nor the charismatic second blessing. It is the baptism of all God's people by the Holy Spirit into the universal body of Christ. The sequel on Thursday from Ephesians 2:1-10 stressed the glorious position the believer has in his relationship to the risen Saviour.

The devotional aspect of the Christian life was given proper attention by Jerry White, pastor of New Covenant Baptist Church, Denham Springs, LA and Lloyd Sprinkle, pastor of Parkview Baptist Church, Harrisburg, VA, who is also a publisher. White raised the question at the outset, 'How can a pastor and his wife maintain the breath of God's spirit on their ministry?' His answer was – by the worship of our Lord – a theme upon which he elaborated. Lloyd Sprinkle, whose publishing concern has recently made available the life and theology of J. L. Dagg, spoke from the 138th Psalm on 'The Grounds of Praise'. 'We who have experienced the knowledge of free grace have a special obligation to praise God' he reminded the audience.

The task of bringing forth the importance of the doctrines of grace from a historical and biographical standpoint fell to Dr. Tom Nettles, professor of Church History at Mid-America Baptist Seminary in Memphis, and this writer. Dr. Nettles spoke on Adonirum Judson on Wednesday afternoon, emphasizing his Calvinistic convictions, his commitment to Scripture, and his confidence in the power of the gospel to convert unevangelized peoples. On Thursday he spoke on the historic use of Baptist catechisms, often quoting from a book he has published on the subject. On Friday morning I dealt with the Presbyterian missionary to the Indians, David Brainerd. I sought to show that the doctrines of grace were a great encouragement to him in his missionary labours and were the instrument in the great awakening among the Indians in 1745.

R. F. Gates, an evangelist from Shreveport, La., concluded the conference with a message on 'Evangelism, our Watchword'. He defined evangelism as the proclaiming of the good news (gospel) so that men can close with Jesus Christ in free pardon of sin. He stated that evangelism is every Christian's business, but especially those who believe that salvation is of the Lord. This rousing address was delivered with much warmth and enthusiasm, and scarcely could have left any conscientious lover of the gospel indifferent on the great business of leading others to God.

I have left for the last an unusual feature of the conference, the reading of Spurgeon's famous message on 'The Blood of the Everlasting Covenant' by Tom Ascol, Spring Valley Baptist Church, Dallas, Tx. This was a worthy effort at a difficult task, and I am sure that all were blessed by the truths that stirred the people of London long ago when originally delivered by the great preacher.

In addition to the major addresses several pastors gave testimonies as to how they came to learn and appreciate the doctrines

1985 WESTMINSTER CONFERENCE

December 17th and 18th at Westminster Chapel

Theme: Spiritual Worship

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17th

10.30 a.m. Worship and the Marian Exiles in Frankfurt – *Kenneth Brownell*

2.00 p.m. Worship amongst the Puritans – the Regulative Principle – *Christopher Bennett*

5.00 p.m. Preaching from Calvin to Bunyan – *Peter Lewis*

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18th

10.30 a.m. The Huguenots and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, 1685 *John Carrick*

2.00 p.m. Benjamin Keach and Non-Conformist Hymnology – *Alan Clifford*

5.00 p.m. 1735: The Harbinger of Revival – *Graham Harrison*

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of grace. Many fascinating experiences were related as to the struggles, joys, and blessings of receiving and teaching these truths. Though the difficulties of introducing these doctrines in areas where they had not been heard before were not concealed, the overall success of faithful ministers in this day was encouraging. One pastor has seen his church experience vast growth and enlargement through the gospel of grace.

Following the Wednesday evening messages there was a forum and discussion on 'Biblical Reformation in the Local Church'. A panel of pastors on the platform answered questions from the audience relating to how churches which have not been accustomed to Biblical teaching and discipline can be changed and redirected. Churches differ vastly in their local customs, traditions, and levels of understanding of truth. Some of the different types of problems in churches were brought to light in a lively discussion between the panel and the audience. Though it is difficult to summarize the wisdom that emanated from this session, if indeed there was a collective wisdom, the basic advice of the seasoned pastors is that dedication to truth accompanied by patience and compassion for the people will cause the gospel to prevail eventually. Teaching the truth is never easy in any age and ours seems to have its own special difficulties.

I feel compelled to add at the end of this report that throughout the conference the powerful influence of the church that sponsors and oversees the conference: the North Pompano Baptist Church of Pompano Beach, Fla. was seen. Through the leadership of pastor Ernest Reisinger 11,000 copies of J. P. Boyce's *Abstract of Theology* have been given away, mostly to seminary students and pastors. The seeds being sown around the world by this book and other good Christian literature are bearing conspicuous fruit. May God hasten the day when Southern Baptists and indeed all evangelical Christian churches return to the glorious gospel truths which have so mightily been used of God throughout history. This year's Founders' Conference at Memphis is an indication that God is raising up a noble band of godly pastors, students, and scholars in this day to lead the way in what we hope will be another spiritual awakening.

Next year (D.V.) the Conference will be held 29th July-1st August, at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn. For details contact Ernest Reisinger, North Pompano Baptist Church, 1101 Northeast 33rd Street, Pompano Beach, Florida 33064.

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